



# PROLOGUE

## First Attack

Jimmy Xanthopoulous waded into the Atlantic slowly. He felt sleepy and hungry, and he didn't know what he was doing going surfing so early in the morning. His board—a Channel Islands Fred Rubble board, perfect for the waist-high waves of Cape Cod—felt heavy in his arms. He dropped the board softly on the wash of the last wave and felt the board immediately tug at the tether attached to his left ankle.

“Yo, yo, yo,” he heard someone call.

It sounded like his brother, Dimitri, who was already in the water and already looking for his first set.

The sound of his brother's voice blended with the calls of gulls.

For a second wave, Jimmy did nothing but try to wake up. That wasn't easy. He had worked the dead man's shift at his father's pizza parlor the night before, and after cleanup and prep for the morning crew, he had not left the parlor until close to 2:00 a.m. Now it was 8:27, gray, quiet, soft. Cold for early June. He had slept fewer than five hours.

That wasn't enough.

That wasn't close to enough.

He bent down and splashed his face. The water pushed him awake a little more. The cold seeping into his wet suit made him shiver. He tasted salt on his lips.

Before he lunged forward to get paddling, he saw Dimitri rise up on a wave. That was a kind of magic. People could go from sitting on their boards to standing in an instant. He loved that about surfing. Dimitri was not very good—he was more enthusiastic than skilled—but he stood on a wave—a surfing god, he would say—and

flicked the front of his board back and forth to keep his balance.

“You coming or not?” Dimitri yelled when he finally bailed on the ride.

He hadn’t gotten far. Not a great ride. Dimitri never got a great ride, but that didn’t kill his juice for it.

“It’s cold, and I’m tired,” Jimmy called back.

“Get into it. You’ll be all right.”

Dimitri began paddling back through the surf. Jimmy watched him. He loved his brother, admired him, emulated him. Dimitri was a sophomore at UPenn, a physics major, sort of a nerd, sort of a geek, who had taken up surfing and dragged Jimmy along in his wake.

Jimmy was a junior at Upper Cape Cod Regional Technical high school. He was not a physics major. He was an athlete, a three-sport starter in lacrosse, soccer, and wrestling. And a surfer. A darn good surfer.

“Okay, okay,” Jimmy mumbled under his breath.

He shoved through the water for three steps, then sprung smoothly into a prone position on the board. The cold Atlantic sucked into his wet suit and made it hard

to catch his breath. He felt his body shrink away from the cold, and to combat it, he paddled as hard as he could. He could not get warm. He spotted one of the gulls from earlier sitting on the water. The gull stared back at him with a sharp, appraising eye.

He paddled fifty yards out. Half a football field. The swells coming at him only bubbled up three feet or so, then ran forward and crashed on the sandy beach of Wellfleet. Not great surf. Nothing special. Jimmy had tried to tell Dimitri that they could wait and have better sets later in the week when the weather people forecasted a storm, but Dimitri wouldn't hear it. He wanted to surf. So Jimmy went with him.

“You realize we're the only ones out here, right?” Jimmy said to Dimitri when he paddled up beside him. More than anything else about surfing, Jimmy liked sitting next to his brother and talking.

“So what? We have the place to ourselves.”

“That's because the waves suck, and it's freezing.”

“You surf when you can, my young friend. Learn from your older brother.”

Dimitri smiled. He always smiled. He had, Jimmy knew, a sunny disposition. And that could get irritating sometimes.

“Do you know you look ridiculous in your wet suit?” Jimmy asked.

Because he did. Dimitri looked like a cheerful black frog.

“I am one with the sea,” Dimitri said. Then he lay down on his board and began paddling hard. “Here comes one.”

Jimmy watched him. It was strange to be beyond the break. Jimmy always found it strange. Watching from out beyond the break, anyone paddling for a wave disappeared temporarily, then rose up, and suddenly appeared, gliding along the water’s surface. Pretty remarkable, really. Jimmy watched Dimitri until his brother fell off the wave. Then he was alone.

He looked out at the horizon. Far out, misty in the morning fog, he saw a tanker sliding by on its way south. A few clouds tucked close to the horizon, blending with the sea. He could not hear a thing this far out except the

gentle wash of the water when it rubbed against the sand of the beach. He smiled.

Dimitri had been right to get him out of bed on such a morning.

He shook himself. His sleepiness gave way to attention. He could surf. He was a good surfer. That's what he told himself. When it came to bats, balls, and balance, he had skills. Mad skills. He counted three swells, all too puny to try for, but then he saw a good one rolling toward him. It built and piled on itself until he could sense the water's forward momentum.

"Okay," he whispered.

Sometimes he whispered to himself. He always had. It steadied him.

He stretched out on the board and dug his hands into the water. He maneuvered his board into position, paddling until he was an arrow on the bowstring of the wave. Now, at last, he felt somewhat warmer. He felt his pecs stretch with the burden of paddling. He kicked softly with his feet, using them as rudders, his breath coming in short, quick pants. Although Dimitri meant it as a joke, Jimmy

*did* feel one with the sea. Ridiculous, he told himself. He was turning into a nerd like his brother.

Then something hard and as explosive as Thor's hammer hit him from below.

He flew into the air.

Three feet up, and when he came down, his legs dunked into the water while he grabbed for the board with his arms.

*What the . . .*, he thought.

If what he felt could be called thought.

He looked around, scared suddenly, and tried to climb back onto the board. In the next instant, however, something fierce and horrible grabbed his leg. A pain more terrifying, more excruciating, than anything he had ever experienced ran like a million hornet stings into his brain. He screamed. It came from way, way down. It filled every molecule of his brain and body.

He tried to yank his leg away, but he had nothing to grasp except the board. The board flipped over. It skittered across the surface of the water and then jerked to a stop against the tether. The pain kept ringing and ringing and ringing in every cell.



Something violet and red began spreading around him. A few gulls ducked down and circled close. And then he saw a huge black fin cut the water next to him.

“Shark!” he screamed.

*Because what else do you call?* he wondered.

That part of his brain still worked and still laughed at his predicament. He yanked the tether cord toward him, and the board came back into reach. He flipped it fast and tried to pull himself up on it, but the fin suddenly wiggled next to him and he realized—*oh no, oh no, oh no*—that the animal attached to the fin was on him.

“Shark!” he shouted again, but this time his voice didn’t work.

Then in one quick jerk, he went below water, his hands slipping off the board and saying goodbye to it. He looked at the shark and saw it. *Saw it!* It was huge and dark and its eye looked at him impassively, almost curious, and for an instant, he felt no fear. None. He decided he could go now, he could go with the shark, they could swim off into the gray-green water and live happily ever after.

And then—as much in dull wonder as anything

else—he reached forward and tried to poke the shark in the eye. That much he remembered. You should try to poke a shark in the eye if it grabbed you. So he did. He did not expect it to work, but to his amazement, the shark immediately released him and swam away, its fin cutting little slits in the sunlight above them both.

Jimmy turned and grabbed the tether, and he pulled himself up onto the surfboard. He did not look down, and he did not look at his leg.

*What leg?* his mind asked.

His leg looked like a mangled hunk of ham. Like shark leftovers, left in the fridge for a midnight snack.

Dimitri suddenly appeared next to him.

“Jimmy? Jimmy?” Dimitri kept asking.

“Get me to shore,” Jimmy whispered. “A shark . . .”

“You’re bleeding. Oh no, you’re bleeding.”

“Get me to shore. My leg—”

The fin appeared again, this time in front of both boards. Dimitri screamed at it. But the shark disappeared below, and Jimmy paddled forward, his hands still working, the sea still lifting him like a plate being put on a shelf.



# 1

*Massachusetts.*

Barn Whimbril looked at the word backward and forward, up and down, but he couldn't quite get his mind to wrap around it.

He had spent years thinking about Massachusetts. About the Red Sox. About his dad, who spent summers in Massachusetts. But he had never thought seriously about visiting Massachusetts until two weeks before, when his mother, Jane Whimbril, had dropped it into their conversation like someone dropping a sugar cube into a cup of tea.

*A friend of mine has invited us to visit her on Cape Cod, his mom had said. Cape Cod, Massachusetts. You remember her, I bet. Gail Polland. She's a famous writer.*

*And?* he asked, because he knew she had mentioned it for a reason.

*And I thought maybe I'd say yes. That we would say yes. You'll be finished with school by then.*

That's how he found himself sitting on a plane bound for Boston. That's how he found himself looking at the in-flight computer screen tracking across the Eastern Seaboard. Sarasota to Logan airport. Three and a half hours.

Florida to Massachusetts.

“Are you hungry, Barn? I've got those dried dates you like. And I packed us some carrot sticks. And we have power bars.”

“I'm okay, Mom, thanks.”

His mom slipped her arm through his. She liked it when they could sit quietly and talk, and a plane was as good a place as any for that, he guessed. He liked having his mom's arm under his. She smelled like lemongrass. She

always did. She wore an oatmeal-colored sweater, a long paisley skirt, and Birkenstocks on her feet. Kind of a hippie, Barn understood. His mom taught English at Sarasota High School back home in Florida.

“You excited?” she asked.

“I guess so.”

“Gail is an old friend. She’s done very well for herself. We went to high school together. I remember her always writing. Always. Diaries, little books, projects, you name it. We grew up side by side. It would be like you visiting your buddy Finn twenty years from now.”

Barn nodded. His mom had already told him about Gail, and she had made the comparison to Finn a half dozen times. It was almost as if she had to offer a reason for visiting an old friend. He had googled Gail Polland and checked her out. It was true: She was a famous writer. If he understood it correctly, she wrote mysteries set in England in the early 1900s. In her pictures, she looked older than his mom. She wore a lot of scarves.

He had also googled Woods Hole. Jessup Sabine, his friend and supervisor at the Florida Fish and Game, had

informed him that Woods Hole, Massachusetts, was one of the top ocean research facilities on the Eastern Seaboard. Barn had plans to visit it midweek of their stay. Jessup used to work out of Woods Hole, and if he could get a break from work down in Florida, he planned to join them. That was still up in the air.

“Dad worked on Cape Cod, right?” Barn asked a few minutes later. He already knew the answer, but he liked hearing the stories anyway.

“Yes, out in Provincetown. At the end of the Cape. He did beach cleanup. Mostly custodial stuff. He was young. He always loved talking about that summer.”

“And he lived on a boat?”

“For one summer he did. The *Dog Bite*. It was a funny boat. A man rented it to him. It was just set up on braces at the side of his house. In summer, Cape Cod gets tremendously crowded so people can rent out almost anything for top dollars.”

“And everyone up here is a Red Sox fan like dad was?”

She squeezed his arm. He could never tell if she hurt when she talked about his dad, her husband, who had died

in Afghanistan. He guessed it was a little hurt and a little love mixed together. Barn thought about his dad often. He couldn't help asking questions sometimes.

“Pretty much, honey. Be careful not to say anything nice about the Yankees. It's the best rivalry in sports. That's what your dad always told me.”

“I won't. Go, Sox. Yankees suck.”

“Maybe we can get you to a game at Fenway. Gail knows people. She's not exactly a sports person, so I don't know. Maybe we'll just enjoy the beach.”

“Anything would be great, Mom. We can play it by ear.”

Then something happened that often happened to him. One of the flight attendants stopped in the aisle beside him and smiled. She was a woman about his mom's age, maybe late thirties, who had a helmet of blond hair and a lot of makeup. She wore blue rubber gloves and carried a small plastic bag for picking up glasses and snack wrappings.

“Can I just say,” she said, bending over slightly so that she made them into a cozy conversational triangle, “that your son has incredible hair?”

Barn felt himself blushing. People often commented on



his red hair. He always thought his red hair made him look like a rooster, a Rhode Island Red. It drove him nuts.

“It’s gorgeous, isn’t it?” his mom said, leaning across him as if she had to whisper with the flight attendant. “It’s the perfect shade of red.”

“Thanks,” Barn said, because he found saying thanks got him out of most predicaments.

*Red like a chicken*, Barn thought. *Like a Rhode Island Red rooster.*

The flight attendant stood and crinkled the bag in her hand as if to say she had to get back to work. Then she smiled hard and headed down the aisle.

“Are you sure you don’t want a snack?” his mom asked.

Before he could answer, his phone began playing the theme song from *Jaws*.

*Duh duh. Dun duh dun duh dun duh*, faster and faster.

It was a ringtone from the international shark file. And it meant only one thing:

*Fatal shark attack.*